

To Whom It May Concern at the FCC:

First, Sinclair Broadcasting refused to allow their stations to air *Nightline* when the show presented the pictures and names of fallen soldiers in Iraq. Sinclair was deciding for Americans what we had a right to see, including our own fallen children-soldiers. Now, Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary just before the election is an alarming example of the dangers of our growing media monopolies.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and required by law to serve the public interest, it is Sinclair's responsibility to provide the public balanced, credible, verified information from multiple perspectives so that we can be an informed citizenry. In the case of the so-called documentary Sinclair is forcing stations to air, the people highlighted in this piece have been so discredited, it is alarming they were allowed on the air and given credibility in the first place. A "documentary" is intended to do just what it says, "document." To document requires substantiation. Information that is not credible because it is unverifiable and/or intentionally contains discredited evidence is nothing but propaganda; it is not valuable, substantive knowledge we can use to form educated opinions.

Because the use of airwaves is a gift from the public, our government has a legal, ethical, and moral obligation to ensure that the private sector does not use this power to influence the public inappropriately. The public has not gifted the airwaves to the private sector for use as a propaganda tool to shape our thinking and control us. Therefore, it is the responsibility of our government to ensure that the private sector serves to "inform" the public by providing balanced coverage on issues important to our welfare.

One can look at any dictatorship or government coup throughout history to see that limiting information while using the media for a specific agenda is always one of the first tools used against the people, in order to control the people. Furthermore, the marriage of political and corporate interests is a danger already proven by history. For contemporary examples of travesties resulting from the intertwining of media power and political agenda, we can look at Brazil and Italy. The most recent case, Italy, currently finds its democracy effectively destroyed by the single control of media and its use for that one interest's political agenda. Italians cannot make informed choices because they have limited access to balanced, accurate information, which in turn has ruined their ability to function as a true democracy. Their media and their government are now one, which has removed their ability to protect themselves from narrow interests bent on exploiting them.

Although an informed citizenry is vital for the health of any representative democracy, due to the increasing monopoly ownership of our own media sources, with corporations shaping the information we receive to suit their own agendas, Americans have begun to experience that same misuse power. With corporate America controlling the airwaves, we are receiving more of what is good for profit and personal political agenda. That is a direct threat to our democracy. The public airwaves must be used to help citizens gather credible information needed to determine the fate of our nation; and determining the fate of our nation is what our founding father's intended citizens to do when they created this Representative Democracy.

Earlier leaders understood this concept of “abuse of power” by the private sector. After our nation experienced abuses at the hands of corporate monopolies, our government established anti-monopoly laws. What happened to those laws, those laws created to protect us? Thanks to heavy lobbying and partisan political support from corporate America, those protections are weakened now almost beyond recognition.

Americans pride ourselves on our "free press" and the "public's right to know," while we are critical of governments who use the media as their personal propaganda tools. If our government allows corporate interests to censor what we have the right to see and hear, or to use our airwaves for propaganda, how are we different from those nations we criticize? Sinclair's actions illustrate how corrupt our system has become; how far from the public's best interest, we have wandered. Sadly, Sinclair's actions are merely one appalling example of why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. Media ownership rules need strengthening and the license renewal process needs to involve more than it now does.

Thank you,

Barbara Sheridan